

DURANGO INTERAGENCY FIRE DISPATCH

U.S. Forest Service ♦ Bureau of Land Management ♦ National Park Service
♦ Bureau of Indian Affairs ♦ Colorado State Forest Service

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 27, 2007

FIRE RESTRICTIONS TAKE EFFECT IN SOUTHWEST COLORADO

In cooperation with Montezuma County and other land management agencies, fire restrictions will go into effect on Monday, July 2 for portions of the San Juan Public Lands. Fire managers feel the restrictions are necessary due to continued high temperatures, low humidity, and the abundance of dry cheatgrass and beetle-killed trees in the area.

The restricted area is bounded on the east by Hwy. 84, the south by the Colorado/New Mexico line and the west by the Colorado/Utah state line. The northern boundary runs east along the Dolores/San Miguel County line to the Dolores River, then south along the river to the dam at McPhee Reservoir. From the dam, the boundary follows the eastern shoreline of the Reservoir to Hwy. 184, and then travels south along Hwy. 184 to its intersection with Hwy. 160 at Mancos. From Mancos, the boundary continues east along Hwy. 160 to Hwy. 84 just east of Pagosa Springs. All San Juan Public Lands within this boundary are included in the Stage 1 restrictions.

Major recreation areas impacted include Canyons of the Ancient National Monument, McPhee Recreation Area and Sage Hen at McPhee Reservoir, Bradfield Bridge along the Dolores, and the HD Mountains.

The restrictions will be Stage 1 restrictions which mean:

- campfires are limited to permanent fire rings or grates within developed campgrounds;
- smoking is limited to vehicles, buildings, or 3-ft. wide areas cleared of vegetation;
- chainsaws and other internal-combustion engines must have approved, working spark arresters;
- acetylene and other torches with an open flame may not be used; and,
- the use of explosives is prohibited.

According to Durango Interagency Coordinating Group Chairman Mark Lauer, "There is a wide array of conditions out there right now. Below 8,000 feet, especially in the pinyon-juniper forests, the grasses are tall and they are drying out, but above 11,000 feet recreationists will still find patchy snow and water running down trails."

Fire managers look at several factors when deciding whether or not to implement fire restrictions, including fuel moisture, probability of fire spread, availability of firefighting resources, and amount of human-caused fire starts.

The significant precipitation received in southwest Colorado this spring delayed the start of the summer fire season, which often begins in May, according to Ron Klatt, fire

management officer for the Columbine Ranger District and incident commander for the local interagency incident management team.

"The conditions we are seeing right now are pretty normal for this time of year. The recent hot, dry weather and low relative humidity are decreasing the amount of moisture in the vegetation and fires are spreading a little faster," said Klatt.

There have been just over 100 fires in southwest Colorado this year and more than half of those occurred in June. The County Road 500 fire, which occurred in mid-June on Southern Ute lands, has been the largest fire at 8 acres.

Fire managers say the next 2-3 weeks will be critical ones. "The most recent forecast anticipates the arrival of the summer monsoon period in our area around July 2, however the initial surges of the monsoon moisture typically bring lightning but little moisture," said Klatt. "It usually takes 10 days to 2 weeks for the strength to develop in these surges and bring significant moisture that lessens the fire danger."

During the 2-3 weeks prior to the arrival of the monsoons, southwest Colorado typically receives numerous dry lightning strikes and firefighters often deal with 5-30 fire starts a day.

There have been more than 25 human-caused fires in southwest Colorado this year – many caused by the careless flick of a cigarette out the car window or a campfire left smoldering. The following safety tips are encouraged to help prevent an unwanted wildfire that could have severe consequences:

- Dispose of cigarette butts in an ashtray or other appropriate container.
- Make sure chainsaws have working spark arresters, and carry water, a shovel, and fire extinguisher when cutting firewood.
- Park your vehicle in areas cleared of vegetation, not over dry grasses.
- IF in an area where you can have a campfire, follow good campfire etiquette – use an established fire ring away from dry grass and dead trees, keep a shovel and water handy, and always put campfires completely out every time you leave camp. Pour water on the ashes and stir until there is no smoke and ashes are cool to the touch.

Other entities enacting Stage 1 fire restrictions this week include Southern Ute and Ute Mountain Ute agencies, and Mesa Verde National Park. Montezuma County is planning on instituting a ban on open burning beginning July 2nd.

Due to the increased fire danger federal and state entities have requested additional firefighting resources including a Single Engine Air Tanker (SEAT) that will be based in Cortez, initial attack crews, and engines.

Enjoy your July 4th holiday, but leave your fireworks at home if you're headed to the forest. Fireworks are not allowed on public lands, even when restrictions aren't in place.

Information on fire restrictions throughout Colorado may be found at www.dola.colorado.gov/dem/index.html.